



Child Protection Policy

General Purpose Statement

theWELLbuffalo (theWELL) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices and procedures, our goal is to protect the children of theWELL from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Scope

This policy applies to all ministries and activities of theWELL primarily aimed at children including, but not limited to, theWELLkids, Bethel Buddies, and theWELLstudents.

Definitions

For purposes of this guidance/policy, the following terms will be used:

- **Child (or Children), Kids, Minor, Student, Youth** - includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years
- **Staff** - anyone who is employed or otherwise paid by theWELL, including, but not limited to, employees, associate staff, contractors, interns and staff spouses
- **Formal Volunteer** - any non-Staff individual who works with Children at theWELL on a regular or semi-regular basis; such individuals must formally apply and been screened and authorized as a volunteer for church programs and activities
- **Occasional Volunteer** - includes parents and any others who only provide ad hoc assistance in highly supervised/public environments for relatively short periods of time or limited number of days per year; all Occasional Volunteers must serve under the constant supervision and oversight of Staff members and/or Formal Volunteers
- **Worker** - the combination of Staff, Formal and Occasional Volunteers who care for, work with, teach, counsel and/or mentor children and/or youth
- **Ministry Coordinator** - individuals who organize and lead a specific ministry area for children and/or youth

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children in our programs and activities will undergo an application and screening process unless they are in the category of 'Occasional Volunteer'. This screening includes the following:

a) Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children, with the exception of Occasional Volunteers, must complete and sign a written application using a form provided by theWELL. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation(s), reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file in theWELL office with access only by appropriate church leaders on a need-to-know basis.

b) Personal Interview

For roles with greater responsibility (e.g. Ministry Coordinator, Staff), a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss her/his suitability for the position. The church leadership or the coordinator of the ministry area will be responsible for the interview.

c) Reference Checks

An applicant's references may be checked prior to their working with children. It is not always necessary to perform reference checks if the applicant is well known to the church family. If a reference check is deemed necessary, the references should, if possible, be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Reference checks will always be completed prior to hiring any staff for the church.

d) Background Check

A background check (driving record, criminal, sex offender, child abuse registry) shall be required for all Staff (regardless of position) and Formal Volunteers. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by Staff and/or the Ministry Coordinator on a case-by-case basis in light of all surrounding circumstances. Under no circumstances will an individual be allowed to provide services in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or youth, if the individual has been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult. Generally, other crimes or violations involving dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to theWELL mission will also disqualify an individual from working with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction or other relevant information on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check results will be maintained in confidence on file within theWELL office. Updates to background checks will be done every three years.

e) Lifestyle Commitment

All Formal and Student Volunteers are required to read and acknowledge theWELL Leader Lifestyle Commitment prior to working with minors. This commitment is part of the written application.

f) Record Keeping

TheWELL shall maintain a file for each Formal Volunteer containing the Online Application, Reference Checks, Background Checks, Waivers and any other documentation pertaining to the Volunteer. Files shall be kept by TheWELL for the duration of the Volunteer's affiliation with TheWELL and for a period of three (3) years after the Volunteer ceases to be affiliated with TheWELL. These files shall be maintained securely and confidentially in the TheWELL office with access only by appropriate church leaders on a need-to-know basis. Documents will be destroyed after the three-year cease of affiliation time expires.

Supervisory Requirements

It is the policy of TheWELL to provide adequate supervisory control of persons working with children participating in all church programs. The following shall be applicable to workers having contact with children participating in all church programs:

a) Safety of Children

It is the responsibility of all persons having contact with children participating in church programs to promote the emotional and physical safety of the participants giving regard to all factors and circumstances known to them. If, in their opinion, an unsafe condition exists such persons shall immediately take appropriate precautions under the circumstances to protect all children.

b) Two Person Rule

It shall be the goal of TheWELL that a minimum of two adult Workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during a church activity regardless of the number of participants, location or activity. In some instances, it may be necessary to have only one adult Worker in attendance in which case the doors to the classroom must either remain open or have a glass window. Generally, there should be a minimum of three (3) students with the adult Worker. We do not permit minors to be alone in a completely closed door setting with one adult on church grounds or during any sponsored offsite activity.

In the case of mentoring sessions, if mentoring a youth of the same sex the session must be conducted in an office with a window with another person in an adjacent room or in a public setting (e.g. coffee shop). If mentoring a youth of the opposite sex, the same rule as above applies and the session must be done with a second adult present, preferably someone of the same sex as the youth.

For any overnight youth activities, the following guidelines shall be followed:

- Middle School: same sex chaperone must be in the same room with the students and there should be no less than 3 students in the room (more than 3 students is fine)
- High School: same rule as Middle School but there is not a requirement that the chaperone must be in the room. For example, there may be one chaperone and 5 students in which case the chaperone may room with 2 students and the 3 other students will room without a chaperone (all done with discretion and good judgment of the trip leader).
- No co-ed rooming is permissible for any youth activities.
- Other expectations are stated in the 'Covenant of Expectations' contained in the Universal Permission Form which is signed by the student and parent/guardian annually.

c) Ratio of Workers to Children

It is required that a reasonable ratio of adults to children is maintained at all times for all church programs where supervision is required. Judgment of Staff and Ministry Coordinators will be used to determine the appropriate ratio based on the activity.

d) Staff Oversight

The Staff member responsible for each area shall coordinate with the respective Ministry Coordinators to ensure ongoing supervision of all workers. This shall include regular unannounced visits into classes and other program sites.

e) Check-in / Check-out Procedures

A check-in/check-out procedure will be implemented when appropriate to the program or activity as determined by the Ministry Coordinators. The procedure will require parents or guardians to check children in and pick children up for check-out when they are in 5th grade or under.

f) Kids and Students Annual Registration Form

Prior to participating in an organized kids' program or activity within the scope of this policy, parents or guardians of all regular attendees must complete the TheWELL Kids and Students Annual Registration Form. This form will be filled out on an annual basis to ensure up-to-date information on each child/youth and renewed approval by parents or guardians. The purpose of the form is to collect information (general, emergency contacts, and medical), consents (general, transportation, photo, and medical), and general release from liability. A copy of the completed, signed form will be kept on file in theWELL office. Children of visitors will not be asked to complete this form but, depending on the age of the child, may be required to check in/out their children and provide basic information.

g) Permission Forms

Off-campus activities or programs, such as off-campus missions or fun trips (e.g. skiing, camping, waterpark, beach), require a parent or guardian's awareness and express permission. Individual permission forms for each off-campus activity or program will be provided and children / youth will not be permitted to attend unless a signed form is on file with the church. The Kids/Students Annual Registration Form (see 'f' above) must also be on file and will cover the medical information, transportation permission, and general consent and release from liability.

h) Vehicle Safety

Persons who drive theWELL-owned or privately-owned vehicles for conducting church business or transporting children must:

- be at least 25 years old
- maintain a current valid driver's license
- provide proof of insurance
- never be alone in a vehicle with a child not their own
- comply with all church transportation policies

i) First Aid Training

It will be the goal of theWELL that the majority of paid employees who work with children will maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR. Volunteer workers are encouraged, but not required to get training

Student Volunteers

We recognize the value of Student Volunteers (under the age of 18 years) to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply:

- Must be at least Grade SIX to work with kids Grade FIVE and below or be at least Grade ELEVEN to work with Middle School students
- Must be screened as above
- Must be under the constant supervision and oversight of a Staff Member or Formal Volunteer
- Must never be left alone to supervise children/youth
- Must have the approval of the Ministry Coordinator and a parent/guardian

Sickness Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at theWELL. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not be dropped off or allowed to participate:

- Fever, diarrhea or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be sick will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Workers are also urged to ensure they are not sick with a communicable or infectious disease when interacting with children.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of theWELL not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent or guardian at home.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to the parents or guardians of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Ministry Coordinator to develop a plan of action. Other exceptions may be granted for certain off-site activities, such as missions or fun trips, as appropriate.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of theWELL not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting or other physical discipline of children beyond what is necessary to remove a child from a confrontational situation. Workers should consult with the ministry coordinator if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. The parent or guardian will be notified if disciplinary issues persist.

Managing Diapering & Toileting Activities

Diapering and toileting are especially sensitive areas in the protection of children as they may require physical touching or take place in a closed environment. Proper supervision and a more open environment are two keys to reducing risk for both children and workers.

Children age 7 and under must be escorted to the bathroom if it is not in the classroom.

Children older than 7 years may be permitted to use the bathroom without an escort at the discretion of the adult worker or ministry leader.

In general, the following procedures for management of diapering and toileting activities should be maintained whenever possible:

- Apply the “rule of three” whenever possible – one adult or student volunteer to two same sex children or two unrelated adults or student volunteers to one child.
- Student volunteers may escort children to the bathroom however they may not assist a child except with handwashing. Assistance with taking clothes on/off or sanitary wiping must be done by an adult. Student volunteers may not change diapers.
- Before allowing a child to enter a bathroom the adult or student volunteer must check that it is unoccupied or, if not, they may stay in the bathroom outside the stall.
- Staff and workers are discouraged from being alone with a young child in the bathroom without the benefit of informal monitoring, such as keeping the door ajar, so passersby can observe behaviors.
- Older male children who wish to use a men’s bathroom may do so with proper supervision. Male volunteers or other male church leaders may be called upon to supervise when required.
- Youth cannot be left alone in the bathroom for extended periods of time. Children five (5) years of age and younger should never be left alone in the bathroom unless an emergency dictates.
- Children five (5) years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- 1) For minor injuries, scrapes and bruises, workers will provide first aid (wound cleaning, bandages, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child’s parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up.
- 2) For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be notified in addition to the worker’s supervisor or church leader. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- 3) Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed and submitted to the church office within 48 hours in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. TheWELL insurance company will be notified of the injury.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

TheWELL will respond promptly to any observations or accusations of child abuse. All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously and, without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, assumed to be made in good faith.

For purposes of this policy, the term 'child abuse' refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though she/he may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The law typically uses the following definitions and explanations in determining whether abuse of a child has occurred (see 'Clues for Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect' in Appendix 1 for a more detailed list):

- **Physical abuse**—A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Some examples are asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, and stabbing wounds.
- **Physical Neglect**—The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.
- **Sexual Abuse**—Abuse that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, voyeurism).
- **Medical Neglect**—Refusal or failure of caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental, or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.
- **Failure to Thrive**—A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.
- **Mental Abuse/Neglect**—A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.
- **Educational Neglect**—The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
- **Bizarre Discipline**—Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior

Church workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under their care. Any worker of theWELL who has firsthand knowledge of child abuse or "**reasonable suspicion**" to believe that a child has been or is being abused has a state-mandated duty to report the abuse to New York state officials. In such cases, the worker must simultaneously report the suspected abuse to a pastor or elder of theWELL: (1) to ensure the safety/protection of the alleged victim, and (2) so that further actions may be taken in compliance with this procedure.

Reasonable Suspicion is defined as credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

In the event there is reasonable suspicion that child abuse has taken place, the following actions MUST be taken IMMEDIATELY:

- 1) Call the New York Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-342-3720 to report the incident. The person identifying the potential incident must, by law, be the one to call the Hotline. Persons making reports of alleged child abuse are protected from any liability as long as they make the call to the Hotline in good faith.
- 2) Report the suspected abuse to a pastor or elder of theWELL.
- 3) Call the police if the subject of suspected abuse is believed to be in immediate danger.
- 4) Contact and inform the parent or guardian of the subject of suspected abuse, if that person is not suspected of being the perpetrator of the suspected abuse.
- 5) The person making the allegation will complete theWELL Incident Report Form.
- 6) theWELL's insurance company will be notified. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
- 7) The advice of legal counsel shall be sought before responding to any media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation or public.
- 8) Any worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of suspected abuse or misconduct will be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He/she will be instructed to have no contact with the alleged victim or potential witnesses.

TheWELL will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.

A pastoral visit to the family of the victim will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.

If there is any doubt about a worker's innocence regarding alleged abuse or misconduct, that person will be removed from his/her position and not permitted to work with the children until such time as the worker has been cleared of any wrongdoing.

Training

- At least once every school year, TheWELL will provide basic training on this Child Protection policy to all staff and child/youth workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis.
- All workers are required to attend these training events.
- Documentation of training and attendees will be maintained on file with the church office.

Appendix 1

Clues to Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

Physical Abuse - Physical Indicators

- 1) Unexplained bruises and welts
 - On face, lips, mouth
 - On torso, back, buttocks, thighs
 - In various stages of healing
 - Clustered, forming regular patterns
 - Reflecting shape of article used to inflict (electric cord, belt buckle)
 - On several different surface areas
 - Regularly appear after absence, weekend or vacation

- 2) Unexplained burns
 - Cigar, cigarette burns, especially on soles of feet, palms, back or buttocks
 - Immersion burns (sock-like, glove-like, donut shaped on buttocks or genitalia)
 - Patterned like electric burner, iron, etc.
 - Rope burns on arms, legs, neck or torso

- 3) Unexplained fractures
 - To skull, nose, facial structure
 - In various stages of healing
 - Multiple or spiral fractures

- 4) Unexplained lacerations or abrasions
 - To mouth, lips, gums, eyes
 - To external genitalia

Physical Abuse - Behavioral Indicators

- 1) Wary of adult contacts
- 2) Apprehensive when other children cry
- 3) Behavioral extremes such as aggressiveness or withdrawal
- 4) Frightened of parents
- 5) Afraid to go home
- 6) Reports injury by parents

Sexual Abuse - Physical Indicators

- 1) Difficulty in walking or sitting
- 2) Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- 3) Pain or itching in genital area
- 4) Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas
- 5) Venereal disease, especially in pre-teens
- 6) Pregnancy

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Appendix 1

Clues to Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

Sexual Abuse - Behavioral Indicators

- 1) Withdrawal, fantasy or infantile behavior
- 2) Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
- 3) Poor peer relations
- 4) Delinquent or run away
- 5) Reports sexual assault by caretaker

Physical Neglect - Physical Indicators

- 1) Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress
- 2) Consistent lack of supervision especially in dangerous activities or long periods
- 3) Consistent fatigue or listless ness
- 4) Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- 5) Abandonment

Physical Neglect - Behavioral Indicators

- 1) Begging, stealing food
- 2) Extended stays at school
- 3) Constantly falling asleep in class
- 4) Alcohol or drug abuse
- 5) Delinquency
- 6) States there is no caretaker

Emotional Maltreatment - Physical Indicators

- 1) Speech disorders
- 2) Lags in physical development
- 3) Failure to thrive

Emotional Maltreatment - Behavioral Indicators

- 1) Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking, etc.)
- 2) Conduct disorders (antisocial, destructive)
- 3) Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play)
- 4) Psychoneurotic behaviors (hysteria, obsession compulsion, phobia)
- 5) Behavior extremes (compliant/passive, aggressive/demanding)
- 6) Overly adaptive behavior (inappropriately adult, inappropriately infantile)
- 7) Developmental lags (mental, emotional)
- 8) Suicide threats or attempts